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Deluxe Paint AGA - Intervju

Det var ungefar 20 år sedan som första versionen av Deluxe Paint släpptes. Ett ritprogram som revolutionerade Amigamarknaden och gav grafikdatorn Amiga ett ansikte.

Jag hade nöjet att få en pratstund med en av programmerarna av AGA-versionen, Dallas. Intervjun har tidigare publicerats i Nukleus diskmag Cows n Snakefights nr 6.

Erik: Hi Dallas! Nice of you to taking the time for this interview. Can you please describe yourself. You may paint a portrait as well (=

Dallas: I'm basically a 40 year-old multimedia software engineer and musician who lives in the Santa Cruz mountains close to Apple Computer with his daughter Michelle, wife Masumi and a West Highland White Terrier named Terri.

Erik: How did you got in touch with Electronic Arts?

Dallas: A recruiter contacted me. At the time, I was working for a Xerox PARC spinoff called Metaphor Computer Systems in their Text and Graphics

Daluxe Paint är ett av de mest kända Amiga-programmen.

division. EA already knew me through the tools and utilities I had released through Fred Fish, who maintained a large library of open-source Amiga software. Up to that point, the most popular Amiga program I had written was a shareware hex editor called NewZAP which actually paid for my first Amiga.
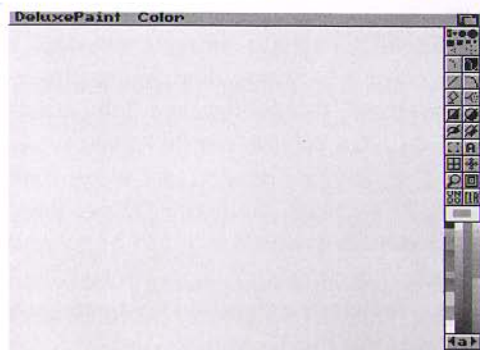
Erik: Thats nice news! Via Fred Fish, did you get in contact to other Amiga friends?

Dallas: Yes, people were very good about supporting shareware and improving other people's code. Most of the programs that Fred Fish distributed were released as public domain, which shows what a great community spirit there was. I lived not far from the original Amiga, Inc. offices in Los Gatos, so between the tools, the Devcons, the First Amiga Users' Group meetings and the shows, I met a lot of great people and most of the original creators.

Erik: Do you still use the Amiga, or at least have you used 'your own' painting program?

Dallas: Interestingly, I had written a Deluxe Paint-inspired program while at Metaphor, and had already interviewed for two paint programmer positions before working there! Paint was kind of in my blood, it was the most exciting thing to do, and nearly everything I've done since has been either art or music-releated.

I do break out DPaintV on Cloanto's Amiga Forever once in awhile to satisfy my Amiga fix. The paint program I use most often these days is Corel Photo-Paint, which was good enough to make me jump ship around 1996. Few paint programs support animation; I still like this one and

try to keep abreast of updates.

**Erik:** How was it to work at EA? Your team?

Dallas: I worked in the Tools division, which created everything that wasn't a game – this included the Deluxe (Paint, Music,Video, etc) series of multimedia products and the Studio (Studio/8, Studio/24) line of art products for the Mac and Windows. My team got smaller and smaller as EA started abandoning productivity apps for the greener grass of titles for the Sega Genesis and what would later become the EA Sports franchise. Our team was quite special, (and at times, quite difficult) but it was also a very hard time because we knew the end was near. By the time DPaint V shipped, all that was left of Tools were myself, co-author Lee Ozer, and a couple of producers. Deluxe Paint life support, basically.

I don't think that EA could ever have a small product team like that again, considering the millions it costs to create a product today. Trip Hawkins, EA's founder, left to start 3DO during this time and in a lot of ways that was the dividing line between the "original" company and now.

Erik: So you would be suprised if EA develops a new version for Amiga OS 4.0? Or maybe sells the license to someone else for new development?

Dallas: That would be up to EA UK, I think. Every once in a while I hear rumors that somebody has approached the Legal Dept at EA's US headquarters about licensing DPaint in some way, but they tend to get swept under the rug because they've forgotten what it was all about. With enough money anything's possible, but it would take persistence and legwork.

Erik: When you started with Deluxe
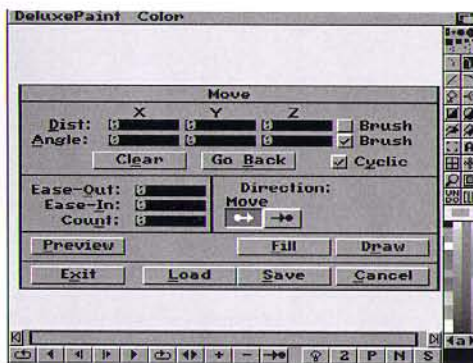
Stöd för att skapa animationer finns också.

Paint IV, which was the first version with AGA, how much of the project time was analysing, designing, coding and testing?

Dallas: I came in on the tail end of Deluxe Paint IV, working on the 4.1 patch. It was a great time to work, because the Amiga 3000 had just shipped with Amiga OS 2.0, and we had a prerelease motherboard containing the unreleased AAA chipset (think A3000 with AGA and a DSP socket). It was called "The Plywood", because it was screwed onto a piece of plywood along with a power supply and kept hidden inside a cardboard box.

I'm happy to say that very little time was spent designing, because both Lee and I knew exactly what we wanted from Day One – to get DPaint ported over to Amiga OS 2.0/3.0, add ECS and AGA support, and (particularly for me) make the program gracefully handle images created on different platforms. The entire process took about six months, and helped make the A1200 a very successful release.

Erik: The creator of Deluxe Paint, Dan Silva, made the first 3 Deluxe Paints. Did you get any picture of him how he was like?

Dallas: I only saw Dan three times; twice at First Amiga Users Group meetings, and once when he came back to

say -hi- while working at Autodesk. My impression was of this tall, amazingly tanned guy with partially Greek or Middle-Eastern features. I was introduced as the new Deluxe Paint programmer, and when we met he just kinda stared at me and I got the impression he was thinking "who's this guy and what's he doing to my baby?" Very protective. Or maybe he was thinking of coming back to EA, I don't know!

Erik: Did some from the team implemented some hidden messages in Deluxe Paint IV or V (until today unknown?) :-)

Dallas:

Not that I can recall, lol! No easter-eggs, at least from IV on. The closest thing to a "public secret" we had was the serial number encryption mechanism, and a story that Lee Ozer had booby-trapped the source code so we could tell where it came from in case any of it leaked.

Erik: Which piece of software, algorithm, tool of Deluxe Paint are you most proud of?

Dallas: There are a number of things that I was especially fond of, such as the Airbrush in DpaintV, the 4.5 AGA screen & mode requester, AnimPrinting, things like that. Some of the less-sexy features were actually quite difficult to do – like the "best choice" algorithm for determining what Amiga mode could best open an arbitrary image, per-frame palettes, and integrating the ASL requester library into the product.

My personal best was writing the DPV Player utility that replaced the (essentially unchanged since version three) original. The original was based on a stripped-down version of DPaint, and if you consider that the new one was less than half the size, several times as fast,

ARexx-automatable, and could stream from disk – it was really quite an achievement.

In a way, I was trying to out-do Apple's QuickTime and Video For Windows, both of which were in their infancy and getting a whole lot of media attention. Mac users were thrilling over these little postage-stamp size animations while we were streaming full-screen full-motion video on the Amiga. It was great.

Erik: One thing I didnt like with Deluxe Paint, was that there was no big UNDO-buffer. With other words you could just go back one step back. Was this never up in discussion when developing?

Dallas: Not really! We were very much in tune with our beta testers, and took customer feedback quite seriously but "unlimited Undo" was an uncommon feature around 1993 and wasn't high on people's wish lists. Today with more memory and hard disk space to work with, it would be a "must" feature. More testers were demanding "ARexx, ARexx…" possibly for the futurism inherent in the idea and partly to play catch-up with other products. But when it was done, how many people used it really?

Erik: Well ARexx was quite popular in the mid of the 80's. In fact I started to code it aswell. Do you by the way find any other coding languages interesting? Perhaps still coding sometimes?

Dallas: Ah, I guess that after C++ the new languages I tinkered with were scripting languages like JavaScript and Perl. I got sucked into Windows programming from Windows '95 on, and that's a world in itself. After leaving Electronic Arts I earned a master's degree in Music Engineering (DSP) and helped develop another popular product, SONAR, for a
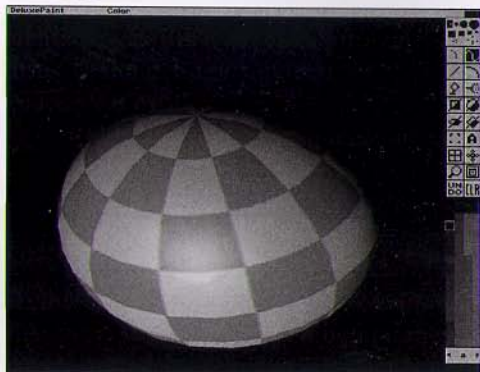
Boing!

music sequencer company called Cakewalk in Massachusetts.

Erik: If Im not wrong, you actually got DP IV AGA when buying an A1200. Due to the Software piracy, did this affect your salary? :-)

Dallas: Not at all! Commodore licensed the right from EA to bundle DeluxePaint 4.5 AGA with the original A1200s for $1.5 million (US) . At the time that was considered quite a coup, because C= was threatening to go with Personal Paint if we didn't agree. And Personal Paint is still around!

Besides that, of course there was a lot of piracy but I'm told that we had 50% market penetration for Deluxe Paint back in those days which is phenomenal. And on top of that, Deluxe Paint wasn't even copy protected for most of its lifetime.

Electronic Arts used to maintain an in-house list for the benefit of the producers describing every program that EA ever sold and how much money it made, sorted by revenue. It wasn't until 1994 that Deluxe Paint dropped off the first page of that list – quite an accomplishment! It was EA's success with cartridge titles for the Sega Genesis that finally knocked us off.

Erik: Wow, that was intresting! Must

have given you/your team satisfaction! Have you by the way heard about the Demoscene?

Dallas: You mean all the Euro-kids who coded up those great looking underground graphic demos? I was in awe of that, I'd sit there with my Amiga Action Replay at home disassembling Copper lists to see how they were done. The thing was though, that they were very finicky and often broke on anything other than the most generic Amiga systems. A lot of the coders seemed to have this Atari ST mindset whereby the first thing you do when writing a demo is open up your Hardware Reference Manual and blow away the operating system. Trying to write flashy demos on the Amiga that run in a system-safe way is very hard – much harder than banging on the bare metal, actually.

Erik: Thanks a lot for this interview Dallas. Do you have any last words to those people still using Amiga and/or Deluxe Paint?

Dallas: Visit www.AmigaForever.com and support Cloanto's efforts at keeping the Classic Amiga alive through emulation. They've done an absolutely wonderful job at keeping that current, and I'm very grateful to them for it. Paint on!

/Browallia

Surfa in på safir.amigaos.se!